

[14 December, 2006]

RAJYA SABHA

to establish a Bio-National Science and Technology Endowment Fund and a Joint Sciences Technology Commission;

(b) if so, whether this fund has corpus of over \$15 million and could be opened for private sector of the two countries;

(c) if so, whether any modalities in this regard have been finalized and worked out; and

(d) if so, the details thereof?

THE MINISTER OF EXTERNAL AFFAIRS (SHRI PRANAB MUKHERJEE): (a) Yes, Sir. Science and Technology cooperation between India and the U.S. was discussed during President Bush's visit to India in March 2006, and the intention to establish a Bio-National Science and Technology Endowment Fund and a Standing Science and Technology Joint Commission was announced at the end of the visit.

(b) to (d) Details with regard to modalities for operation of the Standing Science and Technology Joint Commission and the S&T Endowment Fund have been discussed by the two sides. The Bio-National S&T Endowment Fund is yet to be created. This Fund, as and when it is created, would also be open to private sector participation.

Opening of post offices in the rural areas

*334. SHRI C. PERUMAL: Will the Minister of COMMUNICATIONS AND INFORMATION TECHNOLOGY be pleased to state:

(a) whether no post office has been opened in rural areas in the last few years;

(b) if so, the reasons therefore;

(c) whether Government have any plan to open post offices in the rural areas;

(d) if so, the details thereof; and

(e) if not, the reasons therefore?

THE MINISTER OF COMMUNICATIONS AND INFORMATION TECHNOLOGY (SHRI DAYANIDHI MARAN): (a) No, Sir. During the year 2002-03 and 2003-04, 440 new Extra Departmental Branch Post Offices

(EDBOs) and 26 Departmental Sub Post Offices (DSOs) were opened in rural areas throughout the country.

(b) Does not arise in view of (a) above.

(c) to (e) Post Offices are opened subject to fulfillment of distance, population and income norms and availability of resources. Norms for opening of Post Offices in rural areas especially in hilly, tribal, desert and inaccessible areas are highly relaxed and subsidized.

In consonance with the policy directives of the 10th Five Year Plan regarding rationalization of the postal network, no plan targets for opening of new post offices have been allotted since 2004-05. Therefore, if justification for opening a post office is found, it can only be opened on a case to case basis by relocation of an existing post office which is no longer justified, as per departmental norms at its present location.

Supply of potable water by municipalities

*335. SHRI RAJEEV SHUKLA: Will the Minister of URBAN DEVELOPMENT be pleased to state:

(a) whether Government are aware of high contamination rate of potable water supplied by municipalities to homes across the cities in India;

(b) if so, whether Government have taken or propose to take any action to ensure that water supplied to homes by municipalities is free from contamination;

(c) if so, the details thereof; and

(d) if not, the reasons therefore?

THE MINISTER OF URBAN DEVELOPMENT (SHRI S. JAIPAL REDDY): (a) "Drinking Water Supply in urban areas" is a State subject. It is the responsibility of State Governments/Urban Local Bodies to provide safe drinking water to population living in urban areas, in accordance with the Water Quality Guidelines indicated in the Manual on Water Supply & Treatment published by Central Public Health & Environmental Engineering Organisation (CPHEEO), technical wing of Ministry of Urban Development, Government of India. State Governments/ULBs should undertake water